On the Bat's Back

Where the bee sucks there suck
In a cowslip's bell I lie.
There I couch when owls do cry
On the bat's back I do fly
After summer merrily.
—"The Tempest

Weekly Examiner (Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, England) · Sat, 23 Jul 1960 · Page 6
Downloaded on 28 Dec 2024

Newspapers by Ancestry
https://www.newspapers.com/image/942050225/

A New Zealand Probe

MACAULAY pictured a time when "some traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge, to sketch the ruin of St. Paul's." A traveller who has made the journey the other way is David Ausubel, an American professor, who spent a year (1957-58) as a Fulbright research scholar in Psychology at Victoria University, Wellington.

The Professor put the New Zealanders under the microscope and has published his findings in "The Fern And The Tiki," the fern standing as the symbol for the white New Zealander and the tiki, best known of all Māori ornamental figures, for the native Maoris.

New Zealand is a faraway land, on the other side of the world, with which we have the closest ties of blood and race.

The sporting links are of the strongest, and so are the trade links. When we think of New Zealand we think of England, or perhaps Scotland. Politically, too, it is much like our own scene, for has it not a Welfare State, even more given to welfare than our own?

The New Zealanders we have met are charming, easy-going people, culturally related to ourselves, if speaking in the Cockneyish style of the Australians, and as casual in their ways, if less brash than the Aussies.

But most of us have never seen the New Zealanders at home, and this is where Prof. Ausubel has the advantage over us, if advantage it can be called.

For, to tell the truth, Prof. Ausubel, to put it mildly, is not enamoured of the New Zealanders. In fact, he has little good to say about them. Applying the test of a newcomer of "friendliness, accessibility and hospitality," he finds the New Zealanders lacking in all counts. They are hostile, resentful and bigoted towards other nations, a guest is placed on the defensive almost immediately on entering the door, and "American visitors and tourists, in particular, are regarded as fair game for sharp practices."

"I think it would be fair to say," Prof. Ausubel remarks, "that visitors to New Zealand are not welcomed with the same open-hearted and unequivocal friendliness that characterises the reception of visitors in most American communities." The forms of politeness may be evident on occasion, but not the substance. This is illustrated by an example which will be recognised as not peculiar to New Zealand. "When one is placed at a hotel dinner table with a party of strangers, the latter consistently tend to discuss business matters, office politics or personal acquaintances and make little or no attempt to include you in the conversation; yet they never fail to beg your pardon if they do not pass the sugar before you ask for it, or to excuse themselves when leaving the table."

On the other hand, the effects of a few drinks on deportment are appreciably more rapid and drastic than the critic observed to be the case either in England or the United States. "The tone of conversation more frequently tends to become belligerent, uncouth, offensive, and punctuated with a profusion of coarse oaths and four-letter vulgarities, not withstanding the presence of ladies."

All this would perhaps not have appeared so distasteful to the observer were it not based upon the New Zealander's smug opinion of himself and his conviction that the New Zealand pattern of life is superior to that anywhere else in the world, and in particular America.

The criticisms as quoted above may seem trivial, and not worth basing a whole book upon. But Prof. Ausubel's probe goes deeper. He is out to discover the reasons which account for New Zealand life being such a paradox of great possibilities and small town thinking. "Why, in a young pioneering country renowned for its bold experiments in political democracy and social welfare legislation, is there currently such passion for safety and respectability, such reluctance to come to grips with the inescapable realities of modern economic life, such a dearth of vision and imaginative thinking?"

A study of race relations in New Zealand forms a considerable part of this interesting book, which will no doubt infuriate New Zealanders but may help them to take a fresh look at themselves. One rather suspects Prof. Ausubel of being almost wholly without a sense of humour, but he must have permitted himself a wan smile when he wrote "finis" to this work.

PUCK

"The Fern And The Tiki," an American view of New Zealand, by David P. Ausubel (Angus and Robertson, 25s. net).

Cook's Corner

AS a fry pan addict Philip Harben's new "Book of the Frying Pan" went straight to my heart. Mr. Harben contends that any form of cookery can be done in a frying pan, and I spent a happy evening investigating his claim.

Here is a down-to-earth cookery book, with every detail clearly explained. I learned a great deal I didn't know about ways of cooking even the simple egg. The very way of heating fat is made clear to the novice. Example: "Very violent bubbling instantly—fat too hot. Flames and black smoke—Dial 999!"

—D.T.

"Book of the Frying Pan" by Philip Harben. (The Bodley Head 9s. 6d.).